DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 248 826 HE 017 713

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TITLE	Self-Esteem, Locus of Control, and Career Maturity in Homemaking-Oriented, Traditional, and Non-Traditional College Women.
INSTITUTION	Maryland Univ., College Park. Counseling Center.
PUB DATE	84
NOTE	12p.; Light type throughout document.
AVAILABLE FROM	Counseling Center, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Career Choice; College Freshmen; College Seniors; *College Students; *Females; Higher Education; Locus of Control; *Nontraditional Occupations; *Occupational Aspiration; Self Concept; *Self Esteem; State Universities; Work Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS	*University of Maryland College Park

ABSTRACT

Self-esteem of female college students at two large state universities was studied, with attention to the relationship of self-esteem to the choice of traditional or nontraditional careers, or homemaking. A second area of interest was the relationship of career maturity and locus of control to career type. A total of 180 freshmen and senior college women at two Maryland state universities were administered the Tennessee Self Concept Scale, Rotter's Internal-External Scale, the Attitude Scale of the Career Maturity Inventory, the Hoyt and Kennedy Orientation Questionnaire, and a personal data questionnaire. The respondents were divided, based on responses to the Orientation Questionnaire and their stated vocational choices, into three career types (homemakers, traditionals, and nontraditionals). The senior women, as a group, scored significantly higher mean scores than did the freshmen on the variables of self-esteem and career maturity. To the extent that these findings suggested a developmental change, the results clearly supported the central propositions of developmental self-concept theories of vocational choice. (Author/SW)

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Self-Esteem, Locus of Control, and Career Maturity in Homemaking-Oriented, Traditional, and Non-Traditional College Women

Georgia Royalty, William E. Sedlacek, and Janet Johnson

Research Report # 2-84

The computer time for this project has been supported in full through the facilities of the Computer Science Center of the University of Maryland, College Park.

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SELF-ESTEEM, LOCUS OF CONTROL, AND CAREER MATURITY IN HOME-MAKING-ORIENTED TRADITIONAL, AND NON-TRADITIONAL COLLEGE WOMEN

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& Janet Johnson

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SUMMARY

The Tennessee Self Concept Scale, Rotter's Internal-External Scale, the Attitude Scale of the Career Maturity Inventory, the Hoyt and Kennedy Orientation Questionnaire, and a personal data questionnaire were administered to 180 freshmen and senior college women at two Maryland State universities. The subjects were then divided, based on their responses to the Orientation Questionnaire and their stated vocational choices, into three "career types": homemakers, traditionals, and non-traditionals.

The senior women, as a group, scored significantly higher mean scores than the freshmen on the variables of self-esteem and career maturity. To the extent that these findings suggested a developmental change, the results clearly supported the central propositions of developmental self concept theories of vocational choice. The results of additional, post hoc analyses further supported the developmental pattern indicated by the original findings.

Studies on women in the United States work force have led to the prediction that, by 1990, nine out of every 10 women will work outside of the home at some time in their lives (Farmer & Backer, 1977). Furthermore, Blaska (1978) concluded that 50-90 per cent of senior college women want a career, in contrast to Empey's (1958) finding that 80 per cent of a sample of high school seniors preferred marriage over a career. Despite this increase in female involvement in the work force, and despite the fact that approximately equal proportions of women and men are entering college, most female graduates continue to enter occupations traditionally dominated by women. Knight, Sedlacek, & Bachhuber (1983) found that most women who graduated from a large state university in 1979 entered traditional occupations in settings traditional for their sex.

Several researchers have proposed that there exist barriers which interfere with a woman's career development and aspiration and serve to limit her career choices. Those variables which are considered to be possible roadblocks or barriers can be divided into those variables which are external to the women and those variables which operate internally. External variables include such things as societal sex role stereotypes, attitudes toward female competence, ecological limitations of time and space (e.g., raising a family and cultivating a career), informal and formal discrimination, (DiSabatino, 1976; O'Leary, 1974; Osipow, 1976). Internal barriers include fear of failure (DiSabatino, 1976; O'Leary, 1974), role overload or role conflict (Farmer and Bohn, 1970; Osipow, 1976), sex role stereotyping (Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, & Vogel, 1970), and low self-esteem (DiSabatino, 1976; O'Leary, 1974; Osipow, 1976).

It has been hypothesized that there may be a life-pattern of self-esteem that differs for career-oriented and homemaking-oriented women. Rossi (1965) postulated that traditional, family-oriented women in their mid-twenties are

receiving the gratifications of being married and raising a family and, consequently, experience high self-esteem. In contrast, she claims, career-oriented women at that time in their lives are vulnerable to doubts about their adequacy as women, and, as a result, experience low self-esteem. Rossi anticipates a reversal ten to fifteen years later. She predicts that by then the professional woman will have high self-esteem and the family-oriented woman, facing personal identity resolution apart from external definitions for what may be the first time, will have low self-esteem.

In order to begin to investigate Rossi's theory, Birnbaum (1975) examined life patterns and self-esteem in gifted, family-oriented and career-committed women in their forties and fifties. Her findings indicated that of the three groups (homemakers, married professionals, and single professionals), the homemakers were the ones with the lowest self-esteem and the lowest sense of personal competence; even concerning child care and social skills.

In addition to low self-esteem, a review of the literature points to two other variables which may serve to inhibit career development in college women. First, there is evidence that college women have a more external locus of control than college males, and, therefore, may be more susceptible to societal cues to limit their occupational aspirations to traditional roles at the time in their lives of life planning and decision-making (Deaux and Emswiller, 1973). Second, research in the area of sex differences in career maturity indicates that females tend to lag behind males in career development and career maturity, and may be less likely to be able to make appropriate career decisions (Putnam and Hansen, 1972; Tyler, 1965).

Given the dramatic changes in the role outside work plays in the lives of women, it appears more important than ever to understand the internal barriers that interfere with the ability of women to attain appropriate career

goals. As more female student enter college with the specific motivational goal of obtaining employment (Mason-Sowell & Sedlacek, in press), the college years are becoming a more critical point in the career development and decision-making of women.

Super, Starishevsky, Matlin, & Jordan (1963) claim that one's vocational choice is the "implementation of one's self concept. Additionally, the actual vocational choice is the result of an extended developmental process which can be assessed in terms of "career maturity". One aspect of the self concept which seems particularly relevant to the study of women's career development is that of self-esteem, which is the self-evaluative component of the self concept. The purpose of the study was to investigate the self-esteem aspect of Super's self concept theory as it applies to college women at different developmental points in the career decision process. Of particular interest was the relationship of self-esteem to career choice, as designated by the "career types" of non-traditional, traditional, and homemaking-oriented. A second area of interest was the relationship of career maturity and locus of control, both correlates of self-esteem, to career type.

Method

Subjects. Freshman and senior women (N=175) at large eastern state universities were administered the Tennessee Self Concept Scale, Rotter's (1966) Internal-External Control Scale, the attitude scale of the Career Maturity Inventory (Crites, 1973), the Orientation Questionnaire (Hoyt and Kennedy, 1958) and a personal data questionnaire developed by the writers. Students ranged in age from 17 to 23, and all but 6 were unmarried.

Procedure. All of the instruments were administered to all of the students in group testing sessions. The order of presentation of the instruments was counterbalanced to prevent order effects form influencing the results.

Students were divided into "homemaking-oriented" and "career-oriented" on the basis of their responses on the Orientation Questionnaire (persons who checked item number 1, 2, or 3 were labeled "career-oriented", those who checked item number 5, 6, or 7 were placed in the "home-making-oriented" category). Career-oriented subjects were then further divided into "Traditionals" and "Non-traditionals" depending on their vocational choice. The non-traditionals were those students whose occupational choice was identified (by the U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1979) as one in which 10 per cent or fewer of those people employed in the occupation are female. Traditionals were those students whose occupational choice was identified as one in which 50 per cent or more of those people employed in the occupation are female. Students who were undecided about their career choice or career orientation, or whose career choice did not fit into one of the "career type" categories, were not included in the analyses.

Data were analyzed for six groups of 30 subjects each: Freshmen Homemaking-Oriented, Freshmen Traditional, Freshmen Non-traditional, Senior Homemaking-Oriented, Senior Traditional, and Senior Non-traditional.

Results

Three fixed effect 2x3 (class standing by career type) analyses of variance revealed that seniors had significantly higher scores than freshmen on self-esteem $F=8.76$, $df=1, 174$, $p < .01$) and career maturity ($F=7.91$, $df=1, 174$. $p < .01$). No significant differences were found among the career types on

any of the three variables.

In examining the differences between freshmen and seniors, a consistent trend was noted; Homemaking-oriented students differed less from freshman to senior than the career-oriented group (Traditionals and Non-traditionals) on all three variables. The significant difference was in the career-oriented women. Post hoc Tukey's t-tests (Hays, 1973) revealed that both Non-traditionals ($t=17.30$, $df=1, 174$, $p < .05$) and Traditionals ($t=17.77$, $df=1, 174$, $p < .05$) differed significantly from freshmen to seniors on self-esteem, career maturity and locus of control, whereas the mean scores of homemaking-oriented freshmen were equal to the mean scores of homemaking-oriented seniors on the three scales.

Discussion

Among career oriented students, seniors had higher self-esteem and career maturity scores than freshmen. However, among Homemaking-oriented students there were no differences between freshmen and senior women. These findings appear to have important implications for counseling and advising women.

Counselors and educators need to be conscious of valuing all roles for women and to remain watchful of the development of self-esteem or lack of it associated with roles such as homemaking. The results of the present study are compatible with Birnbaums's (1975) findings (for gifted women in the 40's and 50's) that homemakers were lower in self-esteem than professionals. Since the study is cross-sectional rather than longitudinal it is not possible to determine if the differences between freshman and senior career oriented women are developmental or based on societal changes over three years, but further work is clearly called for to explore the process.

The findings appear consistent with both the developmental and self concept aspects of Super's vocational theory. Super's contention that persons high in

self-esteem are better able to make more realistic career decisions is supported by the positive correlation between self-esteem and career maturity (.30), and the developmental nature of his theory is consistent with what may be an increase in both self-esteem and career maturity throughout the college years. Super's theory appears to be useful in providing a context to interpret both research and counseling concerning the career development of women, a dynamic area requiring our constant attention.

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